

# THE WORK OF A SHEPHERD

*By helping students at Our Lady of Nazareth, a Marianist school in Kenya, an Ohio couple paves the way for a brighter future.*

BY SHELLY REESE

**M**ichael Githae has never met Bob or Betty Ann Perkins. He lives in Nairobi, Kenya. They live in Centerville, Ohio. Yet he ends his letters to them, "I love you."

While the giver of a gift may know its cost, only the recipient can truly understand its value. Michael, a former street child, understands the value of his education, which Bob and Betty Ann financed.

"He says, 'without you I would have been dead,'" says Betty Ann. "We feel we did something that made a difference."



Betty Ann and Bob Perkins

## Reaching across an ocean

Since the late 1990s, Bob and Betty Ann have contributed to a scholarship program that enables graduates of Our Lady of Nazareth Primary School, a Marianist school located in Nairobi's sprawling Mukuru slum, to attend high school. Thanks to their generosity, Michael and a number of other students have been able to continue their education. In 2009 Michael graduated from Aquinas High School in Nairobi and, with Bob and Betty Ann's continuing support, is now earning a nursing degree at the Sisters of Mercy Nursing School.

The Perkins learned about the OLN scholarship program from Betty Ann's brother, Marianist Father Bill Behringer, who worked in Nairobi during the 1990s. Father Bill told Betty Ann that Father Marty Solma, former director of the school and now provincial of the Province of the United States, was looking for donors to help graduates continue their education beyond the eighth grade.

"We have a deep connection with the Marianists, not only through my brother, but through UD," Betty Ann says. She and Bob met while attending the University of Dayton in the 1940s. She later taught history there for 18 years. "I taught Father Marty in one of my classes," she recalls.

Although they'd never been to Nairobi, Bob and Betty Ann felt they already knew the school, its 1,900-plus students and the crushing poverty they faced. Father Bill had described how the school was an oasis of hope for children growing up in the city's violent, disease-ridden slums.

"My brother used to tell us stories about these kids and describe how the school was literally saving them and giving them choices in life," Betty Ann says.

## The work of shepherds

By helping OLN students continue their education, "We shared our blessings," says Bob, a retired sales engineer. "We helped a student move beyond surviving day to day to a place where he experienced the gift of life."

The value of that gift can never be overstated. As Michael Githae wrote in an email to Father Marty last year, "The work of a shepherd is to make sure that none gets lost and that is what you and my sponsors have done for me. I am so grateful." ■

*Shelly Reese is a freelance writer from Cincinnati.*



Michael Githae

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